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ABSTRACT

This document briefly explores the present status of Women's Studies at Cornell University. Emphasis is placed on the historical development of the program at Cornell, goals and objectives, the present status of these courses, and problems encountered by the program. (MJM)

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WOMEN'S STUDIES:

Where to Now?

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By Jennie Farley

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Since 1970, some 2,000 courses focusing on women have appeared on American campuses. At least 150 institutions have committees or commissions that seek to link their women's courses together into interdisciplinary programs. One of the first courses on women was offered at Cornell, in fact, one of the first Women's Studies Programs was founded here.

Women's Studies at Cornell: Where It Came From

January, 1969	Intersession conference on women raises question of exclusion of material on women from the curriculum, need for research, need for action
Fall, 1969	Faculty-student-staff committee meets weekly to plan interdisciplinary course
Spring, 1970	Course (Evolution of Female Personality) offered in College of Human Ecology
Fall, 1970	Several additional courses bloom; they are linked in an experimental program known as Female Studies under the auspices of the Center for Research in Education
April, 1972	Program applies for status as an academic unit in College of Arts and Sciences
July, 1972	Program renamed Women's Studies. Guided by a Faculty Board of professors from four colleges and by an Advisory Group of students and staff, it is funded for a four-year experimental period in Arts and Sciences
Fall, 1972	Women's Studies offers four courses
Spring, 1973	Women's Studies offers eight courses
Summer, 1973	Summer Session includes six Women's Studies courses
Fall, 1973	Nine courses offered by Women's Studies

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By its nature, Women's Studies is interdisciplinary. Florence Howe defines the field well: "Instead of cutting knowledge into disciplines called economics or psychology or English literature, women's studies cuts through all the disciplines to study a particular group of people, their history, economics, psychology, politics, and so forth."[1] Like American Studies, Labor Relations and Home Economics, this new field was looked on with suspicion at first but now is gradually being accepted.

Cornell's program, like many others, was brought into being by students, faculty, staff and community women. Its ultimate acceptance was made possible by faculty women who identified sympathetic colleagues and administrators, but the handful of women professors could never have pulled it off alone. Robinson has chronicled the development of these programs across the country; she cites Cornell's as typical in terms of development, structure and aims.[2]

What is the goal of Cornell's program? We state it this way: "To encourage the development of teaching and research about women for women and men at Cornell and to cooperate in public service activities with the extension units of the university."

In 1973, educators at Cornell and elsewhere are asking hard questions about the future of such programs. Should there be an undergraduate major in this new field? A master's level program? A minor at the Ph.D. level?

Whose needs is Women's Studies seeking to meet, anyway? Some students want professional training for jobs. Liberation for them is economic independence. Others look for a broad and deep liberal education at the undergraduate level; they'll specialize in graduate studies. Graduate students and junior faculty women look for a friendly environment in which to experiment with innovation in teaching and financial and intellectual support to undertake their research. Community women, in turn, look to the university to be sensitive to their needs.

At some institutions, Women's Studies Programs are frankly political. They seek to change women's heads and in turn to change the male-oriented world they share with men. Some programs discourage men students and teachers. Still others see teaching styles as the real difference Women's Studies can make. They view the traditional teacher-student relationship with distaste and welcome a democratic, experiential approach to learning as the only key to helping women toward independence, autonomy, pride and a new self-awareness.

At Cornell, we eschew the last three aims in favor of integrating the study of women into the mainstream of the university. It may be that someday we will offer an undergraduate major that will combine two years of liberal arts with a solid specialty. Should that come about, Cornell would be awarding bachelor's degrees in Women's Studies with specialization in, for example, consumer economics, anthropology, manpower studies, French literature, American history or whatever. As we are able to hire faculty jointly with regular departments, we hope to develop a graduate minor as well. Students could earn the doctorate in education or sociology or human development or philosophy or any number of majors, with a logical minor in Women's Studies.

We see the service component of our function as vital. The state units of Cornell have a mandate to serve the taxpayers who, after all, make the university possible. We strive to fulfill that responsibility by extending what we are finding to teachers at community colleges, to housewives who want to return to school or work, to women in labor unions, to the vast audiences served by Cooperative Extension.

One method we have of opening the university to community women is that of publicizing opportunities for lecturers. We invite any person not currently on the faculty who has an idea for a course to be taught under our auspices to write it up and submit it. Each term, the Faculty Board reviews these course proposals, invites some proposers to make presentations to Women's Studies students and staff and chooses those that seem to fill the current needs best. The teachers' names are then submitted to the dean for salaried part-time, one-term appointments as lecturers in Women's Studies. Their courses, together with those offered by Faculty Board members, form the term's curriculum.

Of the twenty-seven courses offered so far, eleven have been taught by professors and sixteen by lecturers hired by the program. Where did these sixteen come from? Five are persons holding the Ph.D. degree who would be qualified for assistant professorships and who probably would hold them somewhere if they hadn't followed their spouses to Cornell. Eight others are (or were at the time they taught) students, women who in the course of their own research had turned up such interesting data that they wanted to share it. The other three courses were taught by persons whose outstanding expertise and experience more than made up for their lack of the usual academic credentials.

Women's Studies: What We Are Teaching

Social Philosophy. Women and Justice
Women in America
The Biological Basis of Sex Differences
Women and Sport
The Education of Women in the U.S. in Historical Perspective

The Psychology of Woman
The Social Psychology of Women
Women's Roles: A Cross-Cultural Perspective
The Socialization of Adolescent Girls
Women and Autobiographical Writing
Women in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama
Women and Power: The American Case
Women in Spanish American Literature
Alternative Family Forms in Contemporary Society
Theories of the Marital Dyad
Women in Antiquity
Women in Medieval Literature
Feminist Art Studio
Women and Communism: The Chinese Experience
The Family in Early America
Women and Language
Heroes and Heroines in Literature
Women at Work
Sexism and Racism in Early America
Personnel Administration
Feminine Identity

Women's Studies has much to do in the future. In a tight budget time, it must find financial resources for expansion both inside the university and elsewhere. We must compete with every other program and field for the generosity of foundations, corporations, alumni. At the same time, we strive to build up our solid curriculum, to not apply political tests to our prospective faculty members, to never urge our lecturers to adopt one teaching style over another or to be more feminist or less so, to give them the same academic freedom every other faculty member at this university enjoys. We do not aim to channel all women students into our field nor to create a female ghetto. Twenty-five percent of our students are men as are two of the persons who teach in our program. We are an educational unit, not a political one. We see an urgent need for attention to research yet we feel a moral obligation to the community women and to the students who make our existence possible. We try to offer them opportunities as teachers, as students and as apprentice researchers that they would otherwise not find in this male-oriented university.

Someday, perhaps there won't be a need for special courses on women – these materials will be folded into courses in regular departments. Research on women's history, psychology, education and so on will go forward vigorously as does research on men. Community women will find that university extension programs speak to their problems and needs as well as to those of their brothers, sons, fathers and husbands. For now, however, the university, like American society as a whole, is a man's world. Our work is cut out for us.

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1. Howe, Florence. "No Ivory Towers Need Apply: Women's Studies," Ms., September 1973, p. 47.
2. Robinson, Lora H. "Women's Studies: Courses and Programs for Higher Education." *ERIC/Higher Education Research Report No. 1* (1973), 1 Dupont Circle, Suite 780, Washington, D.C., p. 33 and *passim*.